



Fact Sheet

SC Department of Health and Environmental Control • 2600 Bull Street • www.scdhec.net • Promoting and protecting the health of the public and the environment.

Early Childhood Caries

What is Early Childhood Caries (ECC)?

Early Childhood Caries, formerly known as baby bottle tooth decay, is tooth decay in infants and very young children.

What causes ECC?

ECC is caused by the frequent and prolonged exposure of the teeth to sugar and certain bacteria commonly found in the mouth.

Is the mother's oral health important?

Yes! Like all dental cavities, ECC is an infectious disease. If the mother has dental cavities, she can pass the bacteria on to her child. Reducing the mother's cavity-causing bacteria will limit the amount of bacteria that is passed on to her baby.

How many children have ECC?

- **5 to 10 percent** of young children have ECC
- **20 percent** of children from low-income families and **43 percent** of children in some American Indian populations have this early form of dental cavities.

What are the costs of ECC?

Young children with untreated dental cavities often have:

- **Poor eating habits**
- **Speech problems**
- **Low self-esteem**
- **Weight loss**
- **Loss of teeth**
- **Severe pain**
- **Difficulty concentrating**
- **Failure to thrive**

ECC dramatically increases a child's risk of future dental cavities. Treatment of ECC may require extensive and costly dental care and sometimes even hospitalization and general anesthesia.

Is ECC preventable?

Most cases of ECC are preventable, but early intervention is necessary to prevent or stop the progression of this disease.

What can I do to prevent my child from getting ECC?

- Avoid putting the child to bed with a bottle filled with milk, juice, or other sweetened liquid.
- Clean the infant or child's mouth daily.
- Limit foods and drinks with high sugar content.
- Receive dental care for the family.
- Have the first dental check by first birthday.

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